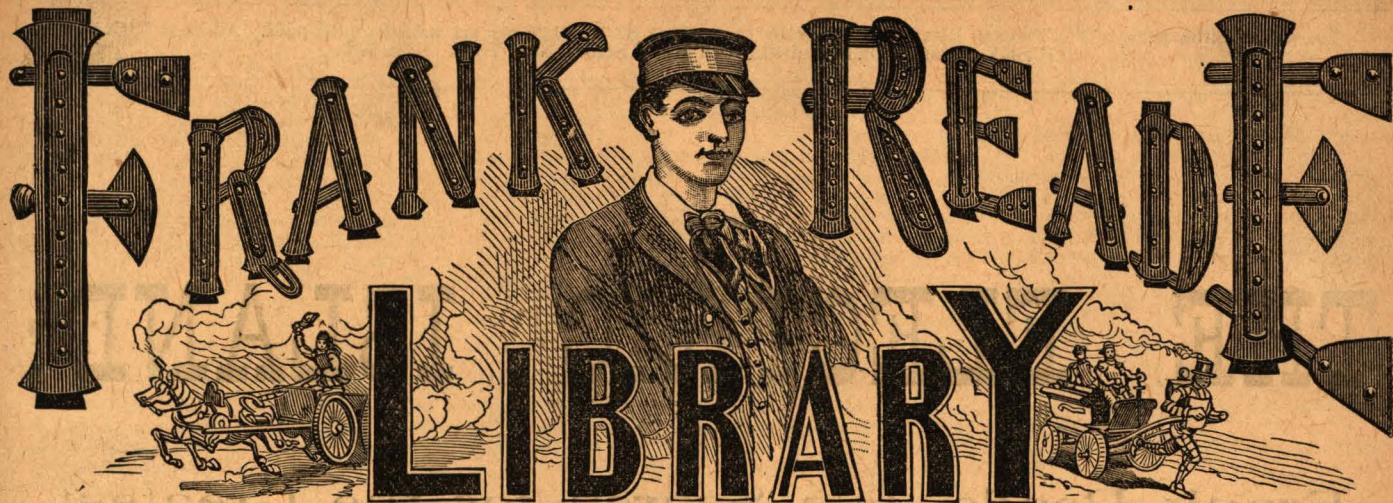


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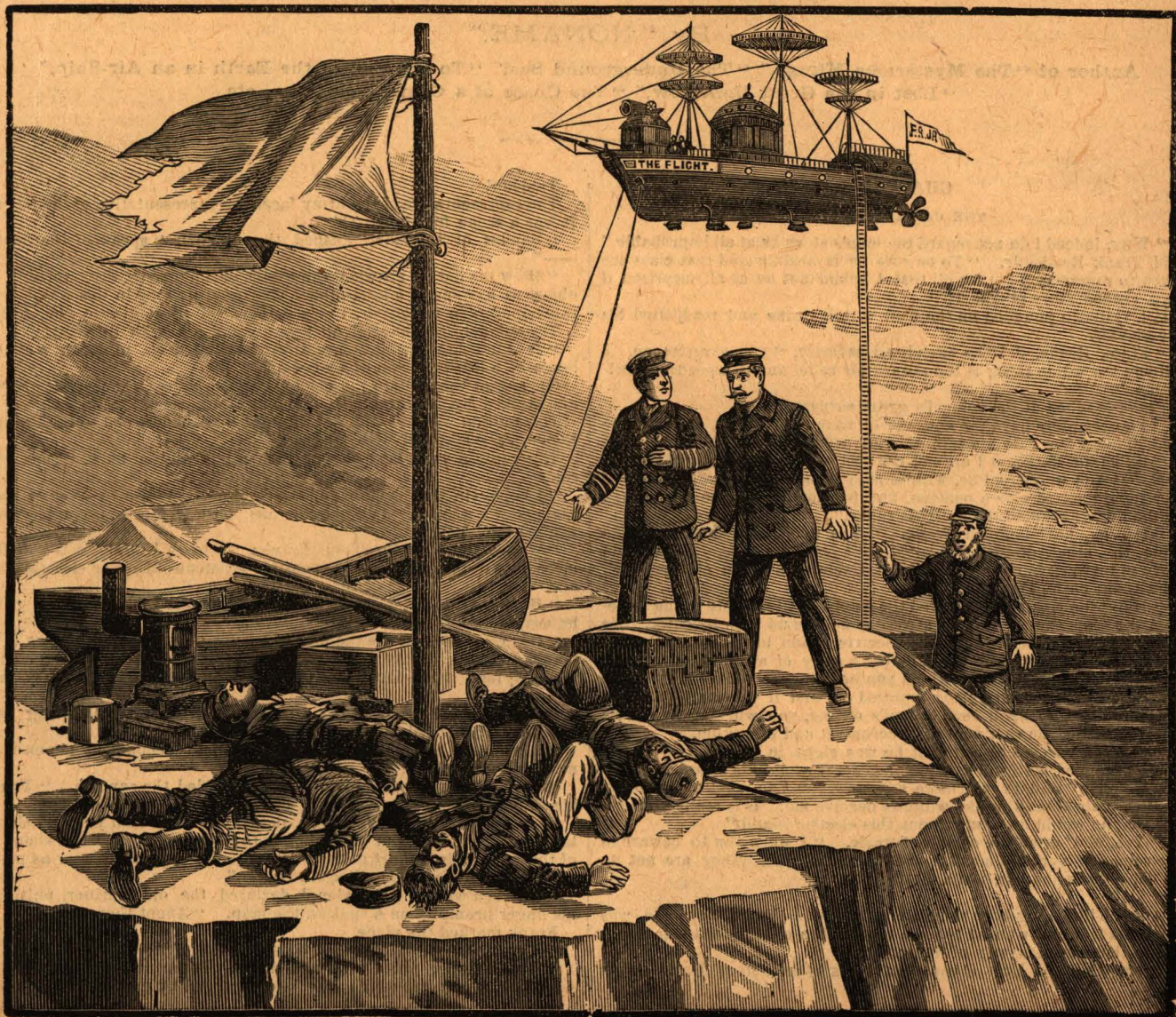
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THE ELECTRIC ISLAND; or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Search for the Greatest Wonder on Earth With His Air-Ship, the "Flight."

By "NONAME."



The explorers stood for a few moments petrified with horror at the sight which met their gaze. There, imbedded in the ice were four men, looking as natural as life owing to the preservative effects of the cold. They had died undoubtedly of starvation and exposure.

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THE ELECTRIC ISLAND;

OR,

Frank Reade, Jr.'s Search for the Greatest Wonder on Earth With His Air-Ship, the "Flight."

A STORY OF MARVELS.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "The Mysterious Mirage," "The Underground Sea," "To the End of the Earth in an Air-Ship," "Lost in the Great Undertow," "The Chase of a Comet," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE CAPTAIN'S STORY.

"WHY, indeed I do not regard the man's story as at all improbable," said Frank Reade, Jr. "To be sure he is a sailor and that class are given to romancing, yet for all that I would not be at all surprised if Matt Owens' story is true."

Col. Gallatin pounded on the floor with his cane and readjusted his eye glasses.

"Frank Reade, Jr!" he exclaimed severely, "you surprise me. I tell you the whole thing is too absurd for belief and is a positive fabrication."

Frank laughed at the colonel's great earnestness.

"You certainly have the courage of your convictions, colonel," he said, "but I fear they are tainted with prejudice."

"I'll admit Matt and I are not the best of friends," declared the colonel. "And who could be, with a man who thinks the disabled soldier should not receive a pension, but that such should be transferred by the government to the indigent sailor?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Frank. "You two veterans, one of the army the other of the navy could not agree by nature. It's the old story of instinctive rivalry. And yet Uncle Sam could not very well do without both of you."

"Hang the rivalry," sputtered the colonel; "I am only trying to defend you from the wiles of an atrocious fibber and yarn inventor. He comes to you and tells you of an electric island in the South Pacific. Nonsense! Supposing I should invent a story of a mountain of gold out in the Apache country, would you be bound to believe me? I tell you, Mr. Reade, you are being imposed on, and if you start out with your new air-ship upon such a fool's errand, you will greatly reduce my respect for you as a man of discernment and discretion."

The colonel's eyes blazed as if he was right in the heat of battle and he wielded his cane as a major-general would his sword.

"Colonel," said Frank, more seriously. "You don't mean to say that Captain Owens would willfully deceive me? Is it really your belief that he would lie to me about this electric island?"

"Yes, sir!" cried the colonel, fiercely. "I warn you to beware of the romantic yarns of a salt horse-eating marine. They are not to be depended upon, sir, not a bit of it!"

"Sir!"

A voice like a fog-horn sounded just behind the colonel. He was upon his feet and whirled to see a type of the old time sea-dog standing in the open doorway of the room.

It was Captain Matt Owens, ten years retired from Uncle Sam's navy.

Tableau!

The representative of the army faced the representative of the navy. It was a scene for an artist!"

"Shades of Sheridan!" gasped the colonel, "speak of the devil —"

"Blow me hard!" growled the owner of the quarter-deck voice, "I object to any son of a land-lubber blackguarding me in this way. By the honor of a sailor, sir, I owe it to myself to challenge you, sir!" The colonel drew himself up proudly and said with dignity: "It is beneath the station of a retired soldier, sir, to accept a challenge of a low born son of a sea-cook."

Glaring at the captain the colonel carried his cane at present arms, and stalked by his antagonist and out of the room.

The captain watched him out of sight and then turned to see Frank Reade, Jr. convulsed with laughter.

The captain sank into a chair with a puff and a blow. Then he said:

"I hope, sir, that you have better discretion than to listen to the ravings of a maniac. I suppose he has been trying to prejudice you against me, sir!"

"Well, I think not," replied Frank; "though I think he is a little incredulous in regard to the possible existence of your electric island."

"He can visit it and see for himself," blustered the captain. "If he were a man of honor he would have accepted my challenge!"

"Oh, you two men are the best of friends only you don't know it," laughed Frank. "At any rate, you are likely to be traveling companions, for I have decided to pay a visit to your wonderful electric island."

"Great fishes!" gasped the captain. "Are you really going to take Gallatin aboard as a passenger?"

"I promised him a year ago that he should accompany me on my next mid-air journey."

"Then I'll not sign shipping papers," growled the captain. "Your air-ship is not big enough for us, skipper."

"Oh, yes you will," said Frank, persuasively. "And you and Captain Gallatin will be put under bonds to keep the peace. But enough of that. Here is a chart of the South Pacific. Locate as near as possible the situation of the Electric Island."

"Sou'-sou'-west of Kerguelen," declared the old mariner, putting his finger promptly on a spot on the map. "About there, sir."

Frank marked the place.

"You have not told me all the peculiarities of the island," he said.

"Well, skipper, about all that I can say is that it is an island of some sort of mineral which has been charged by nature with a pow-

erful amount of electricity. You can literally draw it from the rocks. At night lightning plays across it like a display of fireworks. It's no ordinary sight, sir."

"And yet it is safe to land upon?"

"We landed, sir, a whole boat's crew. One of our men received a severe shock, but I reckon if ye're careful it's safe enough."

"It certainly must be one of the greatest marvels of the earth!" cried Frank, enthusiastically. "It is all settled, captain. This very week the Flight sails. You must be all ready by Thursday."

"Who is in the crew besides myself and Col. Gallatin?"

"Only Barney and Pomp and myself," replied Frank.

"Um!" muttered the aged mariner, and arose.

"Wait a moment," said Frank. "I want you to see the air ship in her completed condition."

"All right, skipper!"

Frank led the way out into the yard of the machine works.

These had been built by him for the construction of his own inventions, for Frank Reade, Jr., was the most famous inventor of the day. Readestown had been founded by his ancestors, and it was a pretty little town upon a river which led down to the sea.

As they were crossing the yards, sounds of what seemed like a serious altercation were heard.

Then the participants came into view.

One was an Irishman with a rich brogue and a shock of red hair. The other was a negro with twinkling eyes and a skin as black as ebony.

"Hi, dar, yo' no count nasty Irishman," cried Pomp. "You needn't tell me dat yo' didn't sass me. Yo' was berry impudent, sah, an' I mus' demand satisfaction, sah!"

"Yez kin have it with a big S," retorted Barney, rolling up his sleeves. "Shure, I'll make putty av such as yez in a jiffy!"

"Golly, kain't stand dat!"

With which exclamation Pomp lowered his head and made a dive for the Irishman.

Barney did not get out of the way quite quickly enough, and as a result, caught the darky's head full in the abdomen.

He went down as if struck by a catapult; then the two rolled over in a lively tussle.

"Great fishes!" gasped the captain, excitedly; "they'll keel haul each other."

"Don't fear for that!" laughed Frank, "they can't hurt each other. This is only a common occurrence."

Just then the two wrestlers who were far from being in earnest caught sight of Frank Reade, Jr.

It had an effect upon them almost electrical.

In an instant they were upon their feet and bowing and scraping before their master.

"Wha' am it, Marse Frank? At yo' service, sah!"

"Do yez want me, sor?"

Frank affected sternness.

"You rascals!" he said, severely, "have I not forbidden skylarking. Open the store-house doors quickly. I wish to show the air-ship to my friend, the captain here."

Barney turned a flip flap and Pomp made a cart-wheel. In a few seconds the big doors flew open.

And there on its stocks rested the famous air-ship.

For a moment the captain gazed spell-bound. The new invention far exceeded his wildest fancy.

"Great Jonah!" he gasped, "that's the prettiest craft I ever set eyes upon."

Frank nodded his head with approval.

"I thought you would agree to that," he declared, "how do you like her lines?"

"Perfect!" cried the old sea captain, enthusiastically. "You are a born designer, Frank. She looks fit for a cup defender in a crack yacht race."

"I have constructed her with an eye to speed!" declared Frank. "And though it might not seem so, as much depends upon the lines of an air-ship for speed as if she were really to cleave the waters of the blue sea!"

"I don't doubt it, skipper," agreed the old captain, "but I reckon a look at her cabin will be next."

"First let me show you about the decks," said Frank.

"All right, skipper."

Frank ascended a high step-ladder, followed by Captain Owens. In a few moments they were upon the deck.

And not until now did the old salt get a correct idea of the wonderful appointments of this most marvelous of all inventions.

This admitted light in copious quantities to the cabin. Forward of this was the pilot house.

Aft was a high cabin above the deck. In this were kept the supplies and stands of small arms, such as rifles and shotguns of every late pattern.

These were easy of access from the deck, and thus an important purpose was subserved.

Guard rails of shining brass ran along on either side of the deck. Amidships was a gangway. Up from the deck rose three huge revolving masts. Upon the tips of these were the whirling rotascopes, which furnished the air-ship its means of elevation.

The mainmast carried but one huge rotascope, but the fore and mizzen carried two each.

These were of steel, and driven at intense velocity by the electrical machinery below decks.

At the stern was the propeller with four huge blades.

This constituted the description in the main of the exterior of the air-ship. The interior was even more wonderful in detail.

Frank led the way into the main cabin. This was a quite commodious apartment and elegantly furnished.

It contained most luxurious appointments, and was equal in all respects to the finest drawing-room.

Beyond this were the staterooms with the sleeping berths, and beyond them the dining saloon and cooking galley, where Pomp presided.

The pilot-house came next, with its wonderful key board, which furnished the guiding power of the ship. Here also were nautical instruments, which were required just as on board a ship of the sea.

But the most interesting part of the air ship was the engine room. This was a wonder.

Here were the electrical engines, dynamos and batteries, operated upon a system invented by Frank Reade, Jr., and the most powerful in the world.

This system was a secret of the young inventor's, and governments had offered large sums for it.

But the inventor always refused to sell, for, as he declared, the various governments desired the secret solely for warlike purposes, and he would never part with it for that end.

"The secret is mine," he said, "and I shall make no false use of it. I think it is as safe with me as anybody."

Moreover, the large sums of money offered him, were no inducement to Frank.

For he had amassed already a large fortune from his inventions, and wished for no more. His inventive genius was now utilized solely for the purpose of self gratification.

Yet there were many cases in which Frank was enabled to turn them to philanthropic ends.

In far off lands he had been the means of rescuing imperiled travelers from savages and wild beasts, and restoring exiled or lost men to their friends.

He stood ready at all times to embark upon expeditions of this kind. For he was naturally of a sympathetic nature.

But this quest for an island in the South Pacific which was in itself a huge magnet, with mysterious electrical atmosphere, promised to him to be the most interesting of all projects yet attempted.

He partook of the fever which Captain Owens had imparted to him. He was thoroughly enthused.

Frank was also determined to reconcile Col. Gallatin and Captain Owens.

Both were very close friends of his and that they should be so utterly at swords points did not seem to him just, or right.

He believed that before the voyage would be ended they would be fast friends, and this was the desired end.

Both Gallatin and Owens could not decline Frank's invitation to accompany him though it must be admitted that they were a trifle loth to fall into each other's company.

This then was the status of affairs at the time that our story of marvels really opens.

Of course the news spread abroad that the air-ship was going to sail upon a specified day that week.

The whole country became much excited over the affair. The most intense of interest was aroused. When the day of departure came an immense crowd gathered in Readestown to witness the ascent of the new air-ship.

Barney and Pomp were right in their element.

To them the prospect of a trip of adventure like this was most welcome.

It is needless to say that Colonel Gallatin and Captain Owens were promptly on hand.

Though they went aboard without formal recognition of each other. But Frank Reade, Jr., promised himself that this state of affairs should not be allowed to continue.

At the appointed hour the big air-ship rested upon a platform in the yard of the machine works.

Everything was in readiness.

Barney was in the pilot-house with his hand upon the motor lever. It needed only a signal from Frank to set all the machinery in motion.

And at the right moment that signal came.

The great rotascopes began to revolve. The ship vibrated, and, as the rotascopes increased their speed, rose slowly into the air.

Up like a huge bird it soared, higher and higher, until the town and the country in wonderful panorama lay below.

CHAPTER II.

OFF FOR THE SOUTH SEAS.

In its lines, as Captain Owens had declared, the air-ship was not a whit below the symmetry and airy gracefulness of a racing yacht.

Its dimensions, however, were slightly larger, and it was broader of beam.

This was for the purpose of economizing space, and this scheme was most admirably carried out.

Above the hull was a dome-shaped cabin amidships, with plate-glass windows in sides and roof.

It was truly a grand spectacle. There was no doubt but that the air-ship was a great success.

Up and up, higher and higher. Now men looked like pigmies, houses like toys, and forests like growths of mere shrubs.

The cheering of the great crowd below died away.

Frank with the colonel and the captain stood by the rail and watched the scene for a while.

"Steer due south, Barney!" shouted Frank.

"All roight, sor!" replied the Celt.

"We will take our last look at Readestown for a good while," said Frank.

"Perhaps forever!" ventured the colonel.

"Those people who are afraid should have stayed at home," snapped the captain.

There is no doubt but that a collision would then and there have ensued had it not been for Frank's tact.

"Hi, there, colonel," he shouted. "You are too near that rail. If we should strike the wind abeam you would surely go overboard!"

The colonel drew back and Frank buttonholed the captain.

The collision was averted.

The air-ship was speeding southward at full speed. Readestown was soon left far out of sight.

New scenes were constantly opening to view below. Hamlets, towns and cities were passed over in rapid succession.

It was a novel sensation, this of sailing in the air. Yet it was a most delightful one.

All day the air-ship kept to the southward. When nightfall came the powerful search-light was brought into requisition.

Then all sat out on deck and enjoyed the balmy air, while the Flight sailed through fleecy mass of floating clouds.

It was all like a dream as the colonel declared, and the captain did not feel able to dispute him. But this was not the only form of entertainment in order.

Barney and Pomp contributed a quota to the amusement fund.

Barney, like a true Irishman, played the fiddle to perfection, and Pomp could strum the banjo and sing plantation songs.

So the two jokers furnished no end of amusement. This was heartily enjoyed by all.

The beginning of the great voyage was most propitious.

What would be the ending?

Our adventurers gave no thought to that. It was quite enough to consider the present and trust to luck for the future.

But none of them seriously fancied but that the entire trip would be a success.

The colonel yet remained skeptical in regard to the electric island, and the captain was just as confident.

But all looked forward with interest to the project in hand and felt hopeful of success.

Day after day the ship sped southward. Now she was over the Gulf and then came the Atlantic. It was a long, long way to bleak Kerguelen.

But Frank knew that if they followed the present course long enough they must get there sometime.

The broad face of the Atlantic lay far below. At times islands dotted its surface.

Then the sea would stretch away upon every hand without an object to break the waste. At such a time the scene was most desolate.

Steadily they drew nearer Equatorial Seas. It now became necessary to stretch awnings upon the deck to protect the passengers from the torrid rays of the sun. The heat was something terrific.

One day Frank came out of the cabin and said:

"We passed the Equator ten minutes ago."

This announcement created a sensation. All looked at the sky with the realization that they were upon the part of the globe which exactly divides its latitudinal measurement in the middle.

The northern and southern spheres here found union. It was a curious and wonderful thing to consider.

But all recollected that they had passed the Equator, and were entering the South Atlantic. All were now looking forward to Kerguelen Land.

But this was a point far south of Australia. It became necessary to first reach an even latitude with the southern point of that continent, and then sail due south many hundreds of miles.

On its long cruise the air-ship sailed serenely away. Thus far its course had been marred by no accident.

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERIOUS WRECK.

But incidents were close at hand. When they did come it was with suddenness and force.

One day the ship hung high in a bank of curious yellow clouds which seemed to extend to the horizon.

There was a curious murmuring sound in the air which was remarked by all.

"Captain Owens," cried Frank, "what does that peculiar sound mean? You ought to be familiar with these freaks of the weather."

The old captain cocked his eye at the brazen sky above and then scanned the horizon.

Then he said:

"Aye, aye, skipper! I think I can see it plain enough. I reckon a wise skipper would lay to under bare poles!"

"What! then you think we are going to have a storm?"

"I do."

The old captain came nearer, and first shooting a somewhat withering glance at the colonel, continued:

"What is more, it will be no ordinary storm. These are the latitudes for the typhoon, which sweeps everything before it. I reckon a ship out of port in this storm will be mighty bad off."

"Do you really believe that?" asked Frank with alarm.

"I don't see any indication of such a frightful storm," sneered the colonel, as he squared his shoulders. "In any event, the air-ship can rise above it."

"I don't know about that!" cried Frank. "These typhoons are a terrific high gale, and I fear we should have to get too high in the rarefied atmosphere to support life. However, that must be our first resort."

"Hang me for a harpooner!" roared the captain, glaring at the colonel. "What is a blasted landlubber to know about an ocean storm, I'd like to know? Perhaps, sir, you have been to sea yourself?"

"It is not necessary for a man to have been at sea to be a good judge of the weather," said the colonel cuttingly.

The captain snorted and instinctively began to roll up his sleeves.

But again Frank Reade, Jr., interfered just in the nick of time. He suddenly gave a great shout.

"Look out! Send the ship up, Barney! There comes the storm!"

In a moment all was excitement aboard the air ship. Everybody ran here and there, completely at a loss to know what to do.

But Barney in the pilot-house had sense enough to obey orders. He touched the rotascope lever.

Up shot the air ship like a huge winged bird. Up she went and far above the clouds.

But the last glance at the sea showed a wonderful spectacle.

It was churned into a terrific foaming mass. It seemed as if a million howling demons had descended upon the water, and were beating it with terrific fury.

Great whirling driving masses of clouds now surged beneath the air ship, and the earth was lost to view.

The pen is hardly adequate to fully describe the spectacle. The air ship, held in suspension far above the storm, was safe.

And the aerial voyagers watched it spellbound.

"Grand!" cried Frank Reade, Jr., "is it not, friends?"

"It is that, skipper," agreed Captain Owens. "You'll see no such sight on land."

"Humph!" was all the colonel said.

"Begorra, it's lucky for us we're out av it," sagely remarked Barney. And Pomp for once agreed with his colleague.

But at such an extreme elevation it was bitter cold. It became necessary for the voyagers to don the warmest of garments.

This was in strange contrast to the torrid heat they had been experiencing before the storm.

But the storm disappeared almost as quickly as it had come on.

It receded into the distance with a dull booming roar, leaving the sea as calm and placid as a mirror.

The sun burst forth again with renewed heat and the air-ship descended from its chilly altitude.

Down to within a thousand feet of the sea the Flight descended. Then a spectacle caused all to give a great cry.

"A wreck!" cried Frank. "Look! there is a hopeless victim of the storm."

All crowded to the rail and beheld a dismayed vessel drifting at will upon the waves.

It was evidently a merchant brig and had been riddled by the terrific storm. She was water-logged and must soon go to the bottom.

It was a thrilling spectacle, and the instinctive thought of all was of the passengers.

Had they shared the fate of many others and gone to a deep sea grave! Or were there survivors aboard?

If so nothing could be seen of them, and it was more than likely that none remained to tell the tale of the brig's misfortune.

The air-ship descended until the deck of the brig, strewn with wreckage, could be plainly seen. But as yet no sign of human life was visible.

"They have all been swept overboard," cried the colonel.

"That is the opinion of a land lubber," said the captain, contemptuously.

"Perhaps a sea-faring man can see signs of life aboard!" sneered the colonel.

"A seafaring man can see that the hatches are battened down and it is possible that some of the crew are beneath them," said the captain. "Lay over a line, Frank, and I'll go down and see what can be found!"

"A good idea!" cried Frank. "Bring a rope ladder, Pomp."

"A'right, sah!"

The dinky brought the rope ladder and it was lowered over the air-ship's rail.

Down it descended to the deck of the drifting brig.

The air-ship was held steady by Barney's experienced hands and then the captain went down the ladder as nimbly as a monkey.

When he reached the deck of the brig he steadied the foot of the ladder and Frank followed him.

They stood upon the deck of the sinking brig and almost the first thing their gaze encountered was a most horrible spectacle. In the heap of rigging lay the half naked form of a man.

His upturned, pain-distorted face showed very plainly that he had died in great agony.

Part of the rigging ropes were wound about his throat, and had evidently strangled him.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Frank, averting his gaze; "that is horrible!"

"You're right, mate," agreed the captain. "You can see how it is. All the others washed overboard—unless there are some in the cabin."

"Shall we lift the hatches?"

"Of course, mate."

Tae captain picked up an iron bar, and with some difficulty the hatch was pried open.

A rush of air came up from the stifling place, and it was of a malodorous kind also.

"Phew!" exclaimed Frank; "that is foul enough. I doubt if anybody could live down in there."

"We'll see!" exclaimed the captain.

Then he leaned over the edge of the hatch and shouted:

"Ahoy! Ahoy below!"

No answer came back.

"Ahoy!"

All was silence save for a faint sound of gurgling water. If any living being was below he was unable to answer.

Frank and the captain exchanged glances; then the latter said:

"I reckon we'd do well to go below and investigate, mate!"

"All right," agreed Frank.

So down into the cabin they went. The light was dim, but yet they were enabled to see passably well.

The brig was evidently the property of rich owners, for she was fitted out most luxuriously.

Her cabins held the most expensive of furniture, and there were evidences of taste which could only be attributed to a woman's hand.

Through the first cabin they passed and into the next. It was here that a sight met their gaze which caused both a chill.

Upon a divan reclined the form of a woman whose beautiful face was upturned and ghastly. In her arms was a little girl of a dozen years who was also dead.

Near by lay the dead form of another woman, a Portuguese, and evidently the nurse.

Instinctively both men removed their caps. They gazed with pity and reverence upon the victims of the storm.

It was easy to understand how they had come to their death.

The hatches battened down had excluded air, the ventilators became clogged, and the crew of the brig washed overboard, had been unable to come to their relief, and as a result they had suffocated.

For some moments the two men gazed upon the sad scene.

Then they turned and went back up the cabin stairs.

Their main thought now was to get back to the air ship.

It was plain that they could succor nobody aboard the brig. It was also fast settling in the water.

The signal was given to the air ship, and the rope ladder descended again to the deck. In a few moments Frank and the captain were once more aboard the Flight.

Course was once more set to the southward. The brig was last seen as a mere speck on the horizon.

It was only one of many victims of the terrific storm, which periodically swept over these seas.

For days the air-ship sped on its southward way.

The air now began to grow colder as they progressed below the Tropic, and it became necessary to wear the thickest of clothing.

The winds were peculiarly chill and piercing. Indeed, one day, while the sky was overhung with dark gray clouds and a mist was creeping up from the earth, Barney sighted an iceberg in the distance.

Instantly glasses were brought and the berg subjected to a close scrutiny. It was then seen that it differed from other bergs in the vicinity.

It was much larger and more crystal-like, and as they were regarding it, Frank gave a sudden cry.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE BERG.

INSTANTLY the attention of the others was attracted.

Frank handed the glass to the captain and said:

"Captain Owens, take a good look at that berg and tell me if you do not see a flag on it."

"A flag?"

"Yes."

Instantly all were excited. A flag upon a distant berg suggested many things of a thrilling sort.

There might be castaways upon it, half starved and hoping for rescue.

Although this might deter the air-ship in her cruise, Frank in humanity could not resist the appeal for aid.

"I can carry them to Melbourne," he declared, "and we can sail south from there to Kerguelen."

"By all means give the poor souls aid," said the colonel. "I highly approve of humanity."

"We can't leave 'em there to die, I reckon," said the captain.

"Bear more to the east, skipper."

The air-ship was therefore held down for the distant berg. Every moment she drew nearer.

And now the flag could be plainly seen waving from a splintered vessel's yard. It was but a strip of dirty sail cloth.

But it bespoke the fact that there were castaways upon the berg and that they needed help.

Every moment the air-ship drew nearer the berg.

Eyes were strained to catch a glimpse of the castaways, but they were not in sight.

"Are we too late?" cried the colonel, "do you think they are all dead?"

"Let us pray not!" said Frank; "they may be in some other part of the berg."

The berg was a monstrous floating island of ice, covering acres in extent. There was an easy possibility that the castaways were in some other part of the berg and might not have seen the air-ship.

But this theory was soon exploded. As the air-ship settled down anchors were thrown out.

The Flight swung two hundred feet above the berg, so as to avoid any possible peril of a collision. Then rope ladders were thrown over.

It was arranged that Frank, Colonel Gallatin and Barney should descend upon a tour of exploration.

Pomp and the captain were to remain and guard the air-ship.

Swinging out upon the rope ladder, Frank slid quickly down. The colonel followed him and Barney came next.

They with difficulty secured footing on the icy pinnacle upon which they stood. But they managed to finally gain a little flat spot upon the main part of the berg where were the remains of the cast-away party.

For a glance sufficed to reveal the fact that not one of them had escaped death.

The explorers stood for a few moments petrified with horror at the sight which met their gaze.

There, imbedded in the ice were four men, looking as natural as life owing to the preservative effects of the cold.

They had died undoubtedly of starvation and exposure, and the ice had formed over their bodies in a solid block.

Words can hardly describe the horror and surprise of the relief party. They had come prepared to save human life.

But they were too late!

There was none to save.

There were the effects of the castaways, a pitiful collection of cooking utensils, which had, however, probably never been used, owing to lack of fuel, and a couple of seamen's chests.

There was also a shattered boat laid up on the ice, just as it had come out of the storm.

"Well," said Col. Gallatin after a moment, "it don't look as if we could help them much, Frank!"

"No," agreed the young inventor, "poor souls! What a dreadful fate it must have been!"

Barney had pried open one of the chests.

"Begorra, Mither Frank," he said, "here's something that may tell the whole story to yez!"

The Celt held up a small bundle of MS. It was stained and soiled, but the penciled lines were yet legible.

Frank took it quickly and glanced over it. He gave an exclamation.

"You are right, Barney," he declared; "this will give full explanation."

Then he read:

"A log of the crew of the ship Vista, from Clyde, England, bound to Melbourne. Struck this iceberg the 25th of March, 18—. The ship foundered and went down with all save four of the crew—Jans Olsen, Frank Bird, able seamen; Howard Vane, purser; John Whitcomb, captain.

"We succeeded in saving one boat and some of the wreckage. Our fate is a hard one. Death stares us in the face.

"March 20th.—Have looked for a sail every hour, but none rewards our patient vision. Can it be our fate to die on this terrible berg?

"March 29th.—Nine days of horror and suffering. No sign of a sail.

April 5th.—Olsen died to-day of starvation. Bird is dying, and Vane is sick. Have all I can do to keep the breath in his body. I can feel terrible pangs assailing me."

This was all the matter contained in the log which explained at all the fate of the castaways.

Beyond this all was but a simple entry of meteorological observations and other irrelevant matter.

Frank folded the manuscript up and put it in the pocket of his fur suit.

"We will preserve this and send it to the owners of the ship at Clyde," he said. "It will explain the mystery of the vessel's disappearance."

"A good idea," agreed the colonel. "Nobody knows how many poor souls are anxiously waiting yet for her to return."

"Correct."

But Barney, who had not been idle the while, had made another startling discovery.

This was a curious winding passage which seemed to lead down into the center of the berg.

Listening at its mouth one could hear a curious sullen roar. At once they were interested.

There were rude steps cut in the ice, and it was evident that the castaways had been in the habit of descending by means of them.

Where the passage led to, or what was below, was not of course an easy thing to guess.

The simplest way to solve the mystery seemed to be to descend them. And this after some discussion was done.

Frank Reade, Jr., led the way, Barney followed him, and the colonel came next.

Down the ice steps they went, until they had reached a depth of full twenty feet. Then they came into a cleft in the berg, from whence a view of the sea could be had.

And at this juncture Barney pointed seaward, and cried:

"Begorra, wud yez luk at that for a fog! Shure, ain't it a heavy one?"

It was easy to see that Barney was justified in his remark. It was indeed a heavy fog which had suddenly rolled across the sea, and was even then pouring into the cleft in the berg.

For a moment Frank paused. A sudden prudent thought had come to him. What if the fog should grow so dense as to hide the air-ship? Should she slip her anchor rope the situation would be a serious one.

"I have an idea, Frank," said the colonel.

"Well," asked the young inventor, "what is it?"

"It is my fancy that they came down here to get fresh water out of the hollows in the ice wall."

"That may be," agreed Frank, "or possibly auks' eggs in the ice cliffs; or again, to escape the cutting force of a gale."

Then Frank came to a dead halt.

Gallatin also stopped.

"What is the matter?" he asked. "Are you going no further?"

"I fear it would be imprudent," said Frank. "We had better go back."

The same thought crossed the colonel's mind.

"You fear the fog," he said.

"Yes," replied Frank curtly.

So back the three explorers turned their steps. Reaching the summit of the berg once more, they were for a moment somewhat confused.

For fog most dense prevailed everywhere; the air-ship could not be seen.

Indeed no object twenty feet distant was visible; Frank's first thought was of the anchor rope.

He looked for this and saw with a sudden horrible chill that it was gone.

There was the anchor imbedded in the ice. But the rope had parted and a coil of it trailed over the ice.

"My soul!" he gasped. "We are lost!"

"Begorra, the air-ship has broken the anchor rope!" cried Barney; "shure we're in a fix now!"

"Heavens!" cried the colonel, with white face, "the worst has happened, Frank. What shall we do?"

This was not an easy question for the young inventor to answer.

"On my word I don't know," he said, after some while. "I suppose we must wait for the fog to lift."

"Which may not be for days in these latitudes," said the colonel.

"That is true."

"In that time the air-ship may drift so far out of the way that she will never be able to find us."

"Just so."

The three men exchanged glances. A death like pallor was upon the face of each.

"In that case there is nothing for us but to share the fate of these poor wretches whose bodies now lie here in the ice," said Gallatin.

"The chances are that such will be our fate," said Frank.

The three apparently doomed men sat down upon an ice block and were for a time too much oppressed with the horror of their position to speak.

Their situation was certainly a most extreme one.

Left upon the berg without food, a very brief time would suffice to forever seal their fate.

Death with his terrible pinions hung grimly and threateningly over them.

CHAPTER V.

POMP'S SAGACITY.

THERE was but a faint hope for the castaway men, and this was that the fog would shortly lift.

Of course even if the air-ship drifted out of their range, there was the chance of a sail.

But this was remote.

"Bejabers yez kin be shure av wan thing," declared Barney, "the nagger won't give up looking for us until he foinds us, be shure."

"That is right," agreed Frank. "Pomp is faithful to a trust. He will never give up the search for us."

And with this consoling reflection the three castaways waited and watched for the lifting of the fog.

They shouted in chorus and did many other things in the vain hopes that those on board the air-ship might hear it.

But no response came.

Once Frank fancied he heard a distant faint halloo, but this he finally concluded was wholly a matter of imagination.

The fog showed no signs of lifting. Hours passed and then utter darkness came on.

The castaways were weary and hungry. Indeed they were threatened with extreme exhaustion.

So Frank arranged it that while two of them slept a third would watch. In this way the dreary night passed.

When morning came the fog seemed denser than ever. The waves washed sullenly about the base of the berg with monotonous cadence.

Sea gulls and fugitive owls circled, screaming about the ice pinnacles. They would have made good food, but our adventurers had no weapon with which to bring them down.

By this time our adventurers were beginning to suffer most severely. Hunger with all its horrors assailed them.

But late in the day the great bank of fog began to lift.

It was a joyous sight for the castaways, but after all it proved merely a transition from the frying pan into the fire.

For with the lifting of the fog a chill northeast gale set in, wetting everybody to the skin, and chilling them to the marrow.

It seemed as if their doom was certainly assured.

Nothing palpable was at hand to better their condition. Misery was theirs.

Meanwhile, what of the air-ship and Pomp and the captain?

The fog settled down so quickly that Pomp had not thought to act until it was too late.

Then he cried:

"Golly sakes! I done fink Marse Frank bettah cum abo'd afo' dat fog gets too thick."

With the idea of signaling the adventurers, Pomp went to the rail; but to his distress, he saw that they had gone down into the berg, and were cut of sight.

Words can hardly express the dismay and horror of the faithful darcy.

To add to all, there was a sudden snapping sound, and the air-ship recoiled.

"Massy, Lordy!" screamed the affrighted darcy. "We hab broke de anchor rope! Now we'se jes' in fo' trouble! Wha' will become ob Marse Frank?"

"Great whales!" cried the captain excitedly. "That comes of trusting three landlubbers alone on the berg. I knew it was a mistake to let that fire-eating colonel go with Reade. Why didn't he take a man with him who understands the sea?"

"Dat am berry bad!" groaned Pomp. "Mebbe we nebber see dat ice berg again, an' wha' will become ob Marse Frank? Oh, massy, Lordy, dat am jes' a drefful fling!"

But the wailing darcy had sufficient presence of mind to spring into the pilot-house and check the course of the air-ship.

Then Pomp did some admirable mathematical calculation.

He figured it out that the berg was drifting northward at a slow rate of speed.

In that case, the surest way to keep on track of it was also to keep a northward course.

Pomp marked the course by the compass.

Of course the air-ship would drift faster than the berg, but it was the darcy's philosophy that if the air-ship's course was changed when the fog should clear, directly back to the south, then there would be as logical a chance as any of finding the lost men.

This showed a commendable shrewdness and system upon Pomp's part and was greatly to his credit.

The captain attempted to overthrow his scheme, upon the plea of changing currents, but Pomp would not listen to this.

"I done fink dat we kin fin' de iceberg quicker in dis ere way dan any oder," he declared.

And he clung to his theory.

The air-ship's propeller was exerted to keep her from drifting too rapidly, and in this way the two aerial travelers waited and prayed for the fog to lift.

The night came and Pomp tried to use the search-light.

But it made no impression whatever upon the fog.

An ordinary person would have been discouraged, but not so the darcy.

He still kept the air ship as stationary as possible, until a change came in the situation.

This change demolished his plans, even as a wind will destroy houses of cards.

A gale began to blow and lift the fog, but a most terrific nor'easter also set in.

This would have blown the air ship many miles from her course, had it not been for Pomp's pluck. He kept the propeller constantly at work.

This held the vessel head on to the gale. Also an elevation was reached where the wind was not so strong.

But Pomp was in agony of spirit.

"I done tole yo'," he cried; "dey will freeze to death if we don' fin' dem berry quick!"

"Or starve," agreed the captain. "That comes of sending a green-horn like that colonel off with the party. Now, if I'd only been there —"

The captain did not finish. Pomp gave a yell which rose high above the roar of the storm.

"Golly fo' glory! dere am de iceberg down yonder," he cried. "Ki-yi! I done fink dat am de bes' ob luck!"

Through the driving fog and rain something white gleamed below. But one thought was in Pomp and the captain's mind.

Was it the iceberg!

That it was a berg there was little doubt. But was it the right one?

This remained to be seen.

Pomp depressed the boat so that it hung directly over the berg. It was not easy to keep this position in the teeth of such a wind.

In fact so little could be seen below that Pomp was obliged to abandon his first project, and the captain said:

"Avast there, mate! There's no use trying to make a landing in such a wind. Keep her steady and we'll lay by for a clearing!"

"I done flink dat am de bes' way," agreed Pomp. "I don't see as we kin do anything else."

So the air-ship was held as steady as possible directly over the berg. For hours this position was maintained, though at times the berg was hardly visible.

But after a time the wind began to lose its velocity and the atmosphere cleared.

Then Pomp leaned over the rail and gave a great shout.

"Golly, I see Marse Frank!" he cried. "An' dere am all de rest ob dem!"

This was a joyful fact.

There, plainly visible upon the summit of the berg, were the three lost men.

It was a joyful moment!

Words cannot express the delight of all at the re-union. Those on the berg had watched and waited long for some sight of the air-ship.

And when at length it became certain to them that they were to be rescued they were in a transport.

Never before had life seemed so precious—never so much of a boon.

Down settled the air-ship, and a rope ladder was flung over the rail.

Down it fell to the berg, and in a very few moments the rescued party was safely aboard the Flight.

They were much fatigued and worn with the exposure, and for a time gave way to faintness and exhaustion.

But the warm cheer of the Flight's cabin and exhilarating drinks very soon brought them back. Then followed a mutual exchange of experiences.

Pomp's clever work called for most unbounded praise.

It was certainly greatly owing to his shrewdness that the party had been rescued.

But now that all was over the spirits of all revived and Frank directed that the course be changed to the southward.

The air-ship went booming again on its way.

"Now for Kerguelen," cried Frank. "I don't believe we will land on any more icebergs."

"That is right, mate," cried Captain Owens, "if you do, don't take a landlubber along who don't know a fog from a cloud of smoke."

Colonel Gallatin merely said:

"Humph!"

Then he lit a cigar and calmly ignored the thrust. Frank pretended not to hear it.

The storm had now abated, and soon the sky was clear and the sun was shining brightly. But yet the air was fearfully chill.

The days passed rapidly. Every hour the cold seemed to grow more intense.

Also ice-bergs became quite common. It was plain that they were getting into cold latitudes.

They were drawing nearer to the land of the Antarctic.

But it must be remembered that this was the bleakest month of the year in the Polar sea.

Soon the Antarctic summer would come on, and then the ice bergs would disappear and the seas be clear and smooth.

Already they were nearing the latitude of bleak Kerguelen, and now the captain began to study out his reckoning on the Electric Island.

This proved a problem of no slight sort.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TIDAL WAVE.

THE captain experienced some difficulty in locating the wonderful island; but one day he said brightly:

"To-morrow at daybreak we shall sight it."

The result of this was that at daybreak all were on the lookout for the long-sought island.

But the sun rose clear and bright. The air-ship sailed over the spot where the captain had declared the island to exist.

Here was a drawback.

For a short time things were blue aboard the Flight. The colonel was satirical, the captain was confused, and Frank was a trifle doubtful.

But the captain went over his reckoning again carefully and discovered an error.

He came on deck with a much brighter face and manner.

"Heigho!" he cried; "we'll get there now surely, mates. It's a curious mistake, but the best of them have made them."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank. "Then it is an error in reckoning."

"Yes," replied the captain, "we are fully one hundred miles north of the electric island."

"One hundred miles!"

"Yes."

"Humph!" exclaimed Frank, "it won't take long to sail that."

The course of the Flight was again changed. It was reckoned that the Flight would cover the required distance before night.

So all kept a lookout for the isle.

Barney held the air-ship down for a fast run.

Hours passed. Frank kept close watch of the speed register.

It was approaching dusk when he came out on deck and said briskly:

"Captain Owens, we have covered the hundred miles."

The captain was studying the horizon with his binocular. He turned and said:

"Hold fast, skipper, we are sure to sight it soon."

There was a smothered laugh from Gallatin. Even Barney and Pomp looked incredulous.

The captain turned and glared at the colonel. Frank carelessly stepped between them.

This averted a collision.

Again the captain sought the horizon with his binocular. Then he dropped the glass and leaped fully three feet from the deck.

"Whooray!" he screamed; "there is the isle! Now what say ye?"

An instant excitement was created. All crowded to the rail of the air-ship.

Even with the naked eye the distant coast could be seen. Without a doubt they were approaching an island.

That it was the electrical isle remained to be seen.

But this was not improbable. As for Captain Owens, he was dead sure of it.

"I tell ye it's the island," he cried; "there's no other in these waters. Just a mistake in reckoning, that's all."

"Put on speed, Barney!" cried Frank. "We'll soon know."

The air-ship sped on like a hawk. Swifter and swifter she went. Nearer drew the isle.

But as they drew nearer, one thing seemed to puzzle the captain.

His face fell.

"That is powerful queer," he said, "there are trees on that isle. There are none on the electrical isle."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank, "maybe they have grown since."

But the captain shook his head.

"No!" he said, "that is not likely. Can there be a mistake?"

Again Gallatin chuckled and again the captain fell to studying his chart. Barney and Pomp in the pilot house logically discussed the affair.

"Don't yo' fret!" declared Pomp, "dat ole cap'en he jes' know wha' he am about. If dat isle am in dese pahts ob de sea, he find it fo' suah."

"Begorra it's about to me I'm afther thinkin'," declared Barney.

"Shure if he don't find it soon he niver will."

"I'll bet yo' a new hat I'ish dat he does!" cried Pomp.

"Bejabbers, I'll take yez on that."

So the wager was made.

The air-ship was now quite near to the isle. It was a bleak, barren tract not unlike Kerguelen.

But there was vegetation of a ragged sort, mosses and grass and some stunted trees.

Captain Owens glanced at the isle and said almost mournfully:

"No, that's not the place. It is a more barren isle."

"Whew!" exclaimed Frank, "how can that be?"

"The electric island is totally devoid of vegetation," said the captain. "Nor do I believe any can grow there!"

A descent was made and the air-ship rested upon a ledge of rocks. It was at once proved that this certainly was not an electrical isle.

Captain Owens was much downcast. He said:

"It is very strange. I must be very much out of my reckoning. But I am sure the electric isle is somewhere in this vicinity."

"Then we will resume the search to-morrow," said Frank.

"God bless you!" cried the old captain, gratefully. "You have not lost faith in me, Frank!"

"By no means."

"Thank you!"

It was decided to remain upon the isle over night; so anchors were placed, and as darkness came on the search-light was utilized.

A brief exploration was made, but it resulted in no important discovery. The isle was not recorded upon any chart.

That it had been in existence for centuries there was no doubt.

"One thing is quite sure," said Frank; "this locality is seldom visited by vessels. It is possible that this isle was never before sighted."

"Certainly never visited," said the captain, "and the electric isle was never visited by any one else."

Darkness settled down thick and fast. A moaning breeze came in from the south.

The breakers beat heavily upon the rocky shore. It was a wild and weird spot, and seemed almost out of the world.

"Indeed," admitted Gallatin, "it seems, Frank, almost as if we were on another planet."

"So it does," agreed the young inventor. "One is utterly lost to civilization here."

The search-light's rays were reflected upon the roaring, rolling waves of the ocean. It was a mournful dirge the sea sang—it was a lonely, wild, desolate place.

"The end of the earth!" declared Frank; "it may well be called such."

After a while it was proposed to turn in and sleep. But just as they were about to descend into the cabin Owens cried:

"Hark ye! Do you hear thar that distant sound?"

It was a strange, wild, distant murmuring—a vague volleying like a distant note from a battle field.

"Thunder!" ejaculated Gallatin.
 "That's all a landlubber knows about it!" cried the captain, contemptuously. "Up anchors and out of here lively!"

Frank was amazed.

"What is that?" he asked.

"Lively, or we're all dead men!" cried the captain, earnestly. "I tell you I know what it is. I haven't sailed the seas all my life for nothing!"

Frank gave the sign to Barney and Pomp who pulled in the anchors.

But that there was good ground for this the captain's action speedily became manifest.

The dull roaring had increased indescribably until now it was like nearby peals of continuous thunder.

The air-ship sprung into the air. As it did so, the search-light's rays were sent flashing out to sea.

And a terrible scene was revealed. It was not necessary for the captain to vouchsafe an explanation.

For the explanation was here.

A terrific sea, full forty or fifty feet high, driven by the blackest of black clouds, was racing down upon the isle.

The next moment it had reached it. One cry pealed from the lips of all:

"The tidal wave!"

Such indeed it was, the terror of the island dwellers of the South Pacific and the sailor.

Wonderful as it may seem these fearful waves, driven by terrific forces, often pass wholly over an atoll or low islet, sweeping everything portable and living from it.

This wave would certainly have swept the air-ship and its occupants to destruction had they remained where they were.

For the wave passed wholly over the islet.

All that could be seen below were tremendous thundering surges. They went plunging and tearing away out to sea again.

In less than three minutes the wave had passed. The sea subsided slowly while the huge wave went thundering away into the distance. The search-light was turned down upon the isle.

An astonishing sight was revealed. The vegetation and foliage had been completely swept from the isle.

Great quantities of water lay in the hollows and clefts of the rock.

There was no denying the fact that Captain Owens had saved the air-ship. But for his prompt work the fate of all would have been sealed.

Even the colonel was gracious enough to say:

"Certainly none of the rest of us could have known what it was."

But the captain modestly declined all credit for the saving of the air-ship.

"But I knew there was something coming," he said, "and that we must get out of the way of it."

To return to the islet for the balance of the night was possible, but it was not deemed advisable.

So it was decided to let the air-ship drift for the rest of the night; this, therefore, was the move adopted.

The night seemed interminable in its length, but morning at last came.

The sun burst forth over the rolling waste of waters; and almost the first cry given was by Barney who was in the bow.

"Hooray!" he shouted. "Shure there's the land once more!"

CHAPTER VII.

DISCOVERED AT LAST.

FAR to the southward land was certainly seen. Captain Owens brought his glass to bear on it.

"What think you, captain," cried Frank; "is it the Electric Island?"

"On my word," cried the old salt, "it looks very much like it. Let us bear down for it."

"That we will," agreed Frank. "Change the course, Barney."

"Aye-aye, sor!"

The air-ship rapidly approached the newly discovered island.

As they drew nearer it was easily seen that it was an isle more desolate than the one they had left.

There was not the slightest evidence of vegetation on it, and this led Frank to remark:

"Well, captain, what think you? Is it the Electric Isle?"

Captain Owens pointed a finger at the isle and trembling with excitement, said:

"Do ye see that odd-shaped hill with the cleft in it, two points south?"

"Yes!"

"Well, I remember that well. It is the electric island! But there's another way to make sure!"

"How?"

"Look to your compass!"

Frank was about to do this when Barney shouted from the pilot-house:

"Shure, sor, wud yez cum here. There's something the matther wid ther compass, sor."

"That's it," cried the captain, wildly. "I told you so. It is the electric island."

Of course the most intense of excitement followed. But a startling thing now happened.

The dynamos began to buzz, and showers of sparks shot from every point of steel about the boat.

Also it was evident that the atmosphere was very heavily charged in this vicinity. For a moment Frank was in some doubt as to the safety of a nearer approach to the island.

The electric engines seemed bound to get beyond control, and Barney shouted:

"Shure, Misther Frank. I don't believe it's safe. Had we not bether kape away!"

The rotascopes were buzzing and the air-ship rocking furiously. It seemed certain that there was great danger.

Frank stepped into the pilot house. At that moment a flash of lightning shot out from the isle.

This was enough for the young inventor.

"It will never do!" he declared. "We can't approach the isle in that way. We shall go to smash!"

Quickly the engines were reversed and the air-ship drew away from the electric isle.

It was none too soon.

But Frank got the air-ship beyond the range of the electric influence. Then the aerial voyagers exchanged glances.

The colonel, whose doubt was now wholly dispelled, went over to the camp of the enemy.

"Captain Owens!" he said, extending his hand. "I want to apologize to you for presuming to doubt your word, sir. I am more than satisfied."

Owens was nothing if not magnanimous, and promptly replied:

"Colonel, I thank you for the acknowledgment. It is manly, and characteristic of a soldier, sir."

"And your acceptance is as generous as that of a true sailor must be, sir."

"We must be friends."

"We will."

Frank Reade, Jr., took off his cap and cried:

"Hurrah for the army and the navy of the United States. Long may they live, and long may Uncle Sam pension them both!"

The cheer was given with a will.

Then the question of the feasibility of a landing on the island was discussed.

Of course all desired to accomplish this.

It seemed to be much of a problem, but Frank Reade's ingenuity came to the rescue.

"I have it," he cried.

Of course due attention was given.

"Well," exclaimed the captain, eagerly, "what is your plan, Frank?"

"Simply shut off the dynamos, close the storage jars, and make a landing on the beach."

The feasibility of this scheme was at once apparent.

It was decided upon.

The air-ship was so constructed that it could sail in the water like any ordinary vessel.

A few moments later she was in the water and steering for the island.

Before reaching it the captain said:

"When we visited this island many years ago we discarded all articles of steel, and wore rubber boots. Whether it is necessary to take this precaution now or not I will leave it to Mr. Reade to decide."

"I have provided for this contingency," said Frank.

With which he produced some rubber shoes which would act as an insulator upon the heavily charged iron-impregnated soil of the isle. With proper precautions it did not seem possible to receive a fatal shock.

But what a curious freak of Dame Nature was this isle.

Many questions arose.

How had the isle become so heavily charged? Where did the electricity come from, and how was it so curiously stored in this isle?

After some study Frank elaborated a theory.

"It is possible," he said, "that this isle is charged directly from the clouds. Its composition is of a certain chemical quality which attracts electricity and holds it in storage. When it becomes overcharged or there is any electrical disturbance in the vicinity, it doubtless throws it off."

"That explains the lightning flashes which we see occasionally playing over it," assumed the captain.

"Just so," agreed Frank; "that is it no doubt."

"But skipper, do you fancy this island has anything to do with the unknown power which influences the magnetic needle?"

"No," replied Frank, "the principle is different. This isle is nothing but a natural store-house or depot for electricity, nothing more!"

"Well!" affirmed the colonel, "there is certainly no other spot like it on earth."

"We may assume that no other is known," said Frank, "it will be of interest to explore this isle."

"I should say it would!"

The air-ship now rested in the water. The propeller sent her rapidly forward and toward the island.

One hundred yards from the shore the anchor was dropped. Then Frank brought out a portable boat.

As it happened this was of rubber and therefore it could safely make a landing.

Pomp and the colonel remained on board the air-ship.

Barney and the captain were at the paddles and very quickly sent the little craft flying in toward the shore.

A good point was selected and a landing made.

As the explorers stepped on shore they experienced not the slightest shock, but it was all owing to the insulated shoes as they well knew.

Frank led the way along the shore. A bleaker or more barren spot could hardly be imagined.

The soil seemed to be of a peculiar metallic nature. Rocks dislodged would rattle against each other with a clink like that of metal.

Once Barney ventured to pick up one of these stones.

He received such a stinging shock that he dropped it with a cry of pain.

"Begorra, the devil's in them!" he cried. "Shure, I niver want to thry that agin!"

Everybody laughed at this, and Frank suddenly paused before a cleft in the cliff.

A surprising spectacle had caught his attention.

It was a curious scintillating light in the recesses of a group of stiff and starched like reeds.

These were only one of a few varieties of marine plants, which seemed to thrive in the electric isle.

The light was like that of an incandescent lamp, and indeed shone with a wonderful glare from the rocky recess.

Frank saw that two points of the rock came nearly together and made a positive and negative current, acting upon the rock as upon carbon, and on the same principle as the ordinary electric light.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the young inventor, "had this isle been discovered before the day of Edison, there would have been little field for him."

"You're right," agreed the captain; "man's works can never approach those of nature."

"You have hit the nail on the head," agreed Frank; "surely nobody can dispute that point. Heigho, just touch the points of those weeds, Barney, and let me know what amount of electricity they may contain!"

"Ugh!" exclaimed the Celt, with reluctance. "Yez don't want to paralyze me do yez, Misther Frank?"

"Oh, you cannot get much of a shock!" laughed Frank, "but wait! I'll try it myself."

With which he touched a point of the weeds.

A needle-like shock ran up his arm. He quickly recoiled.

"As I thought," he said; "they are a species peculiar to this wonderful isle. Hello!"

The latter exclamation was caused by suddenly catching sight of a wriggling object in the sand.

At first the impression was that it was a snake.

But a second glance caused the captain to shout:

"Hang me high, but it's an eel, mates!"

"An eel!" exclaimed Frank.

"Yes!"

"Begorra, it's a funny koinde," said Barney. "I niver seen the loikes afore!"

"Nor I!" cried the captain.

"But I have," said Frank, quietly; "it is the only species which could live on this isle I believe. Many of them are found in the English channel. It is an electric eel.

This was a palpable fact.

CHAPTER VIII.

ELECTRICAL WONDERS.

THAT the eel was of the well-known electric variety Frank felt sure.

These often wriggled ashore after food, and, in fact, in this respect were not unlike the lamprey.

That it could give a powerful shock was beyond doubt.

Any English boy who has visited the Dover coast knows this from experience.

So it was proven that the electric island had both animal and vegetable life.

What other forms there were remained to be seen.

The party were now all carried away with the project of exploring the isle. Frank led the way along the shore.

They had not proceeded far when another wonder was added to the list.

Out from the rocks there crawled a huge turtle.

It was not unlike those found in the Tortugas in point of size, but it was blood red in color.

Moreover, it had strange, scintillating eyes, and an iridescent, changeable tint that quite confused the eye.

"An electric turtle!" cried Frank; "we ought to have him for a specimen. Let's turn him over, Barney."

"All roight, sor."

Both pulled on rubber gloves. They overtook his turtleship but a few feet from the water.

They laid violent hands upon the monster and—presto! over he went. Also did Barney.

The Celt turned two complete somersaults, and a more astonished Irishman was never seen.

"Tare an' 'ounds!" he gasped; "phwat the devil did it do to me?" Everybody laughed.

"You must have a hole in your gloves, Barney," said Frank.

"Divil a bit," declared the Celt.

But the fact was easily explained. One bare wrist had come in contact with the electric turtle. That wrist was quite numb and sore.

"On me worrad," gasped the Celt, "I niver got sich a tumble in me loife, bad cess to the omadhoun."

The turtle lay struggling on its back. It was decided to leave him there until the return.

So the party set out once more along the beach.

Frank picked up a stone and flung it against the cliff. Of course his hands were protected with the rubber gloves.

There was a sharp clap like miniature thunder and a lightning flash and sparks leaped from the cliff.

Everything about the isle was most powerfully charged with the deadly electric fluid.

Every moment as the explorers progressed new wonders turned up.

Turning an angle of the cliff they came to the mouth of a cavern.

Here was an alluring opportunity. That the cavern held some great wonder Frank felt sure.

So he said:

"What say you, friends? Shall we explore it?"

"Of course!" agreed the captain. "We can't get lost, can we?"

"Hardly."

"Begorra, let us thry it, Misther Frank!" cried Barney.

So they entered the cavern. There was no need of any light to show them the way.

Every now and then, where two points of the rock came together, light in great brilliancy shone forth. All was as plain as day in the place.

It was certainly a most marvelous spectacle.

The walls of the island cave were all ablaze. Suddenly Frank espied what looked like a fallen star of light in the sand at his feet.

At first he thought it an electric freak, but some motive impelled him to make a closer examination.

The result was thrilling.

An excited cry broke from his lips.

"On my word," he cried, "here is a mighty discovery!"

Instantly the others were by his side.

Frank had picked up the glittering ball of light and held it in his hand.

It was the only object they had found thus far, which failed to give an electric shock.

The reason was obvious.

It was of material upon which electricity had no charging effect. It was of carbon, and yet so intensely pure, as to be without susceptibility.

"A diamond!" gasped the captain.

For a moment all three were spellbound. They could only look at each other blankly.

"Begorra, it's a proize!" cried Barney, finally. "It's worth a fortune, sor!"

"Indeed it is," agreed Frank.

It was fully half the size of a pigeon's egg. Its light was of the purest and its value untold.

"Diamonds!" gasped the captain. "Who'd have thought it? We can make our fortune right here, friends!"

The fever seized them at once. All began searching for another gem. Several more were found, but none of that size. All were smaller and of less value.

At length the quest was abandoned, and Frank proposed that they continue their efforts to explore the cavern, so they went on.

The passage seemed to lead downward. Suddenly the roof seemed to expand and a glittering blaze was before them.

At first all thought it a lake of fire spread out before them, but as they drew nearer they saw that it was water.

The glare of the electric focus from many points reflecting upon the water gave it that appearance. Nothing like it had ever been seen by the explorers or could be imagined.

"Is it not grand?" exclaimed the captain.

"We ought to have our pontoon boat here," said Frank.

"You are right."

"It would be worth while to sail upon such a lake. Indeed it seems all like a dream of fairy-land."

"It really does."

But in lieu of the boat it was next in order to take a walk along the shore.

This was followed for some ways, but as the lake seemed to extend an interminable distance into the cavern, it was finally decided not feasible to go further.

All decided to return to the open air.

"We will come better prepared next time," said Frank, "I am carried away with the idea of a tour of exploration in the canoe!"

"Good!" cried the captain, "I'm with ye, mate!"

"First let us explore the exterior surface of the island."

"Begorra, that's roight!" cried Barney. "Mebbe we'll have enough to do that!"

So they retraced their footsteps to the outer air. The air-ship could not be seen from this point.

So Frank suggested climbing a cliff near, to make sure that all was well with her.

The cliff was climbed in safety. The air-ship yet lay safely at her anchorage.

So all fears were allayed.

The back side of the cliff extended downward with a sharp slope for

fully a hundred yards. Barney detached a bowlder with his foot and sent it rolling down.

The effect was remarkable.

For the entire distance down the surface of the cliff a line of fire leaped from the rock. A continuous peal of thunder smote the air.

This showed how heavily charged the island was. It was a most brilliant spectacle.

Assured that the air-ship was in safe quarters, Frank now felt encouraged to continue the exploration inland.

Accordingly all set out for the interior. It was totally unlike any region they had ever seen before.

There were deep cuts and rents in the stone formation of the isle as if at some time nature had played havoc with everything.

There were formations of iron-stone, turned completely into the most grotesque of shapes.

"Jericho!" exclaimed the captain, "this isle must be a shining mark for all electric storms in these quarters."

"You are right," said Frank.

"Do you see that tremendous fissure in the rock? That must have been the track of a lightning bolt."

"Oh, certainly."

At the same instant an idea flashed simultaneously across the minds of both.

"Hang me high!" exclaimed the captain. "I wouldn't care to be on this isle during a storm!"

"It could not be very safe," agreed Frank.

"Why, we would be almost certain to be struck."

"So it would seem," said Frank. Then instinctively both glanced at the sky.

Upon the horizon there was a ragged cloud. The sky was clear and serene otherwise.

It did not seem at all likely that a storm was to be immediately expected. So the explorers put aside their fears.

New wonders were cropping out on every hand. Barney, who kept in advance was irrepressible.

He was continually getting shocked and Frank was obliged to warn him. But the Celt only cried:

"Shure, sor, av I don't put me hands on a thing onct in awhile I'll never know whether it's an electric charge or not, sor."

"You'll perform that feat by and by once too often," said Frank.

"Shure, sor, I hope not."

An hour passed. So engrossed were the party in their research that they lost track of all else.

So that when they were suddenly brought to their senses in an amazing manner, it was to fill them with dismay.

The cause of this was a distant thunderclap. At the same moment a shadow fell over everything.

The sun's rays were excluded.

Everybody looked up, and saw that great angry masses of clouds burdened the sky.

The critical hour had come. An electric storm had been creeping down upon them unawares. Frank's face paled.

"My soul!" he gasped; "unless we can get back to the air-ship before it breaks we are all dead men!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE ELECTRICAL STORM.

WORDS can hardly describe the situation. Certainly a more thrilling one could not be imagined.

The electrical storm was very near at hand.

What folly that they had not observed it before and been prepared for it. It was an even thing now whether they could escape it or not.

But no time was lost.

"Back to the air-ship!" shouted Frank. "Lively all!"

"Begorra, it'll be a race fer life!" cried Barney.

"That is right," agreed the captain.

With all speed they set out on the full run for the isle. On they went as fast as they could.

But it seemed as if they would never reach the shore.

They had come further than they had fancied. Moreover there was no little risk in such headlong haste.

For a stumble or a fall which would bring them in contact with the heavily charged terra firma might result in certain death.

All these things were considered.

So they stepped gingerly and with great caution. On and on they went.

Every moment the elements were marshaling above their heads. The dull sullen boom of the thunder was most terrific.

Lightning began to play in the air.

Here and there they darted. Of course, at any moment the explorers were apt to be struck.

Horrors! Must the storm break before they should reach the air-ship? They set their teeth hard and rushed on.

Now they were upon the cliff ascent.

A terrific peal rang through the heavens. There was a blinding flash and every one reeled.

That bolt had struck the isle. Others must follow.

Now they saw the waves rolling angry and sullen on the beach. The next moment they were upon the sands.

But they were yet some ways from the pontoon boat. Would they never reach it?

On and on! With panting chests and dilated eyeballs they staggered on.

Frank was the first to reach the boat. He tumbled headlong into it. The captain and Barney followed.

The captain picked up an oar and shoved out from the sands. Out into the surf the light craft sprang.

It seemed as if the heavy waves must sink her.

But she was as buoyant as cork and could not sink. Nearer to the air-ship she drew.

The sea was getting heavy and was breaking over the air-ship's deck.

There was no time to lose.

Every peal of thunder, every lightning flash brought terror indescribable with it.

But the explorers bent to their paddles with increased power. They drew rapidly nearer the air-ship.

Nearly exhausted they ran the canoe alongside. Pomp and the colonel were there to help them aboard.

Then Pomp set the air-ship's propeller in motion. Back she ran from the island.

It was fully a mile of perilous progress in a rough sea that she was obliged to run before the electric engines could be trusted to operate the rotascope.

Then the dynamos were given full play and she sprang out of the water like a duck.

All felt safe now; it was an intense feeling of relief.

The escape had indeed been a narrow one.

A mutual expression of gratification followed.

"That was as close a shave as I ever had," declared the captain. "I would hardly care to take my chances over again."

"Nor I," agreed Frank. "I don't think I could have kept on fifty yards further."

"Begorra, I thought the Old Nick had me fer shure," cried Barney. "Shure, an' I believe that island belongs to him."

"Indeed you're not far wrong, I make it," cried the captain, "look at it now!"

The island looked indeed as if his Satanic Majesty had command of it.

Lightning flashes played about it with blinding frequency, and the display of electrical forces was such as our adventurers had never seen before.

They were simply dazzled by the exhibition. The isle seemed one blaze of fire.

"Jericho!" exclaimed the captain, "it's lucky we're not there now."

There was very little wind, but the rain at times descended in torrents.

The clouds seemed to literally come down and touch the isle, and a fierce artillery fire seemed to take place between the two.

The air-ship hung over all, the voyagers watching the exhibition with a wonderful fascination. For hours it was continued.

Then the storm increased with such fury that the air-ship was obliged to rise above it.

This hid the island from view for hours. The air-ship drifted some miles from the spot.

When the storm cleared, however, the air-ship again bore down for it.

Marks of the fierce battle between the electrical forces of the clouds and of the island could be plainly seen.

Huge ledges were shattered, rocks were rent, and debris scattered about.

Frank gazed upon the scene for some while, and concluded:

"The fate of this island can be very readily forecast. The battle between the forces of the sky and its forces will continue until one or the other is worsted, and of course that must be the island."

"You are right!" cried the captain. "The forces of the sky are inexhaustible."

"While the island is being rapidly worn away."

"Just so."

With this logical conclusion another question arose. Should they visit the island again?

The question was subjected to debate. It seemed safe enough now that the storm had passed.

But Frank said:

"We have seen presumably about all of interest there is to be seen. Can we see any more?"

"I don't believe it," said Gallatin. "I should imagine that the best part of this marvel has been seen."

But the captain hesitated.

"We probably won't come to this part of the world again, mates," he said. "Had we not better make a good job of it?"

"Well," said Frank, suddenly pointing to the horizon; "I don't believe it will be possible just at present."

The cause of this remark was readily seen.

A heavy fog was creeping up from the horizon line. It seemed dense, and one of the lasting kind.

To descend upon the island in the face of this fog would seem like a foolish piece of business.

"That settles it!" cried the captain. "We will wait until this fog is past."

So it was decided.

Meanwhile, the fog came on rapidly. Soon it had settled down over the isle and ocean. All was a heavy bank of white. There was nothing to do but to wait for it to pass.

So the voyagers settled down to this, and patiently gave themselves up to waiting.

Barney and Pomp were in most excellent spirits.

"Golly, fish," cried the ducky, "I done fought de debbil had yo' fo' shure down on dat ar island!"

"Begorra, I thought so meself," agreed the Celt.

"I done fink he wud jes' be gittin' what belonged to him, eh?"

"Phwat's that yez say? Shure, yez don't mean to insult me?"

"Huh! Dat ain' no bery easy mattah fo' to do dat!"

Barney's red hair rose literally on end.

"Bejabbers, phwat do yez mane?" he blustered. "Av I thought yez wuz in earnest, shure I'd foix yez, be me sowl on that!"

"Huh! Yu' ain' de size," jeered Pomp.

"Whurroo! that's enuff fer me!" shouted Barney, making a rush for the ducky, "here's for yez. Luk out fer yerself."

"Massy Lordy! Keep away from me chile or yo' jes' git hurted," cried Pomp, shaking his head.

But Barney was not to be deterred. He came on like a hurricane.

Pomp, however, was not to be so easily taken by surprise. He dodged the attack and then in return became the assailant.

Lowering his head like a battering ram he rushed at Barney.

He took the Celt off his guard and fairly in the stomach. Barney was lifted completely off his feet and sat down so sudden and hard that he completely lost his breath.

"Ow, murther, murther!" he gasped. "Shure I'll have the loife av yez fer that. Have at yez!"

With which he regained his feet and rushed for Pomp. There was another collision.

The result this time was more in Barney's favor.

He got a grapevine on the ducky and threw him. Together they rolled across the deck.

In their excitement they got perilously near the edge of the deck. But for the guard rail they would surely have gone over.

But this and prompt work on Captain Owens' part saved them.

"Avast there!" cried the captain; "look out, you lubbers, or you'll be in Davy Jones' locker! Break away, mates!"

"Golly!" spluttered Pomp. "I ain' got froo wif dat fishman yit!"

"Begorra, whin I git through wid the naygur yez will hardly know him I promise yez!"

But Frank Reade, Jr., appeared on the spot at this moment and the two jokers at once assumed a sober attitude. Skylarking was now decidedly out of form.

CHAPTER X.

FATE OF THE ISLAND.

THE fog was wonderfully slow in lifting—all that night it hung over the island.

But in the morning the wind veered, and in a few moments as if by magic the fog was entirely dissipated.

Once more the air-ship hovered over the electric island.

This time it sailed across the isle to the surprise of all on board without any disturbance of the dynamos.

Though the compass was affected as usual. But this phenomenon was easily explained in the fact that the major part of the subtle fluid had been discharged from the isle by the storm.

However, there was no doubt but that enough was left to give one a severe shock.

This was proved by lowering a wire.

The moment it touched the ironstone ledges below there was a flash of vivid light and a current shot over the wire.

This was by no means pleasant to Frank Reade, Jr., who held the wire. But no harm was done.

"Do you want to descend, captain?" asked Frank.

"Well," said the captain slowly, "I don't want to go alone."

"I'll go with you," said the colonel suddenly, to the surprise of all.

"I accept the offer," declared the captain politely.

The insulated shoes and clothing were donned, and then the rope ladder was thrown over the rail.

It fell to the ground, and the colonel stepped out on the rungs.

The captain followed him, and the two men descended.

Frank watched them critically.

The pontoon boat was also lowered for use in an emergency.

It was by no means certain that the air-ship could long maintain her present position.

If the island should suddenly develop electric force in unusual quantity it would be necessary to leave the vicinity.

In that case the two explorers might need the boat.

The captain and the colonel waved an adieu and disappeared over the rocks.

For an hour the air-ship maintained her position. Then the dynamos began to be affected, and Frank decided to leave the isle.

So the air-ship stood out to sea. When a safe distance from the island she waited for a signal from the explorers.

Time passed.

Frank kept an anxious watch of the isle. But yet the pontoon boat did not appear.

"Be me sowl, they're making a long tour av the place," ventured Barney.

"They ought to be on hand by this time, surely," said Frank. "Can anything have happened to them?"

"This was by no means a pleasant reflection. Frank was slow to yield to it.

But as time passed his fears began to strengthen; he felt decidedly like taking an active step.

But what could he do?

To sail over to the island now was impossible. It was at this juncture that Barney cried:

"Shure, sor, there's something wrong with the island!"

"Eh?" exclaimed Frank, and then his face blanched.

It was beyond doubt that there was something wrong with the electric island.

It was seen to be rocking violently, and there was much agitation in the water about it.

What did it mean?

Frank could think of but one solution.

It must be an earthquake.

If so, the fate of the two explorers might be sealed. Frank was horrified.

But yet he seemed utterly powerless.

What could be done?

Certainly the exigency called for some sort of immediate action. But it was a conundrum to tell what to do.

But in this moment of doubt a solution came.

Suddenly Pomp cried:

"Golly, Marse Frank, dere am de boat! Massy Lordy, how high de waves do run!"

A great cry of joy escaped Frank's lips. He realized that his friends were safe at last.

The pontoon was seen pulling for the open sea. The two occupants were evidently much excited.

Nearer they drew and now the air-ship settled down so as to throw overboard a rope ladder.

A line was also thrown to secure the pontoon.

Up the ladder the colonel and the captain climbed and aboard the air-ship.

They were much exhausted.

Their story was briefly told.

"We were exploring the far side of the isle," said Gallatin, "when we heard strange sounds. It was as if some strange power beneath the isle was at work. Then the ground began to rock."

"That was enough for us!" cried the captain. "We at once started for the shore."

"It was a close call," said Frank, "but I am glad that you are now out of harm's way!"

"I thank you!" said Owens.

"But look! see what has befallen the isle."

All eyes were now turned upon the isle. An astounding spectacle was revealed.

The great cliffs seemed bending to the surf which came bounding and thundering up almost to their very summits.

It seemed as if the sea was rising, but the voyagers knew better than this.

"Mercy on us!" cried Colonel Gallatin, "the island is sinking."

Indeed, this was seen to be a certain fact. Astounding though it was, it was nevertheless true.

Spell-bound the voyagers gazed upon this wonderful spectacle. It was easily explained.

The island had undoubtedly been one of volcanic origin.

It was now about to return to the depths of the sea, by some internal commotion of the earth's crust.

The electric island, the greatest of earth's known wonders, was about to vanish from the sight of man.

It was a wonderful thing to think of, that they were to be the privileged few to gaze for the last time upon the electric island.

Steadily it sank into the ocean.

Strip after strip began to vanish until at length only a very small part of it was left.

This was visible but a brief while longer.

There was a sudden violent upheaval, a dull sullen roar, a boiling and hissing of the waters which lasted for fully half an hour.

Then the sea rolled with regular motion over the spot where the electric island had been.

It was no more.

For some while the aerial voyagers gazed spellbound upon the sea. For some hours the air-ship hovered over the spot.

The voyagers watched it as if they half expected the island to reappear. But it did not.

Captain Owens approached Frank on the main deck.

"Well, captain," said the young inventor, "are you satisfied with this result?"

"Perfectly," replied the captain.

"And you are ready to go home?"

"I am."

"That settles it!"

Frank turned and shouted to Barney:

"Set the course northward," he cried. "We are homeward bound!"

Homeward bound!

Magic word!

The voyagers were constrained to give a cheer. It seemed to them as if the end of their adventure had been reached.

The colonel said:

"Our trip has been a great success. Mr. Reade!"

"Don't be so sure of that," said Frank. "We are not yet at the end of the rope. A great deal may happen before we reach home, and our trip is not ended until then."

"Which is right, skipper?" cried the captain. "Let us compromise and say that the trip thus far has been a success."

"Exactly," said Frank.

"I am satisfied," agreed the colonel. "Let us hope that the trip home may be just as successful."

The Flight now set out on her northward way.

It was with a feeling of relief that the party realized, after all, that they were on their way home.

Frank intended to touch the corner of the Australian Continent, and from thence pass on to New Guinea to Asia, across Europe and the Atlantic home.

This would be traversing the exactly opposite sphere of the earth, and would give the voyagers an opportunity to view some wonderful countries.

All were enthused with the plan.

The colonel was much interested in natural history and botany, and was desirous of penetrating the interior of Australia for a ways.

Frank promised him that he should and this had the effect of making him very happy.

It was a long sail over tempestuous seas to Australia.

There were times when head winds held the air-ship in abeyance, and she consequently could not make as good progress.

Nevertheless she kept on day and night. One day Frank came on deck with a glass.

He scanned the horizon for some while, and said:

"We shall sight the continent before noon."

"Hurrah!" shouted the colonel.

A good watch was kept for the land. As Frank had predicted about noon land was sighted.

It seemed to the voyagers as if they were already more than half way home. And indeed so rough had been the last week's journey that they were justified in this.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BUSHMEN.

THE hard battling against head winds had been a severe strain upon the machinery of the air-ship as Frank had learned.

But yet, it showed no signs of a break-down, and the young inventor had faith that it would last until they should reach home.

Such a cruise as this could never be undertaken again by the Flight. Her work would be done. She would have sailed over twenty thousand miles.

But Frank had not intended to ever use her again anyway. His mind was already occupied with a new and wonderful invention.

Rapidly the air-ship drew nearer the Australian coast.

No effort was made to find a sea-port or any habitation of civilized beings.

Indeed, this was deemed best to avoid. The purpose in landing was wholly to rest the engines of the air-ship and give Colonel Gallatin a chance to conduct his explorations.

The long cliff bound coast was now beneath them.

The air-ship sailed into the interior for full fifty miles. They crossed a barren plain where the emu fed, but finally reached a fertile valley. And here the party descended.

The air-ship rested upon a small elevation among some oak trees. From this point an extensive view was to be had.

There was a cooling spring near and the woods were full of game.

The pheasant abounded and soon a hunting party was organized; this was an enjoyable experience.

Frank at once began renovating the machinery; this occupied a full day of hard work.

But he soon had it all right; and then there was leisure time upon his hands.

The voyager were charmed with the beautiful region.

It was a great relief to get upon terra firma after a long spell of sailing in the air.

But so far no adventure worthy of note occurred.

There were beasts of prey in the vicinity and much large game. The deer and the kangaroo abounded.

But the black, that cunning bush native, seemed to be missing.

Yet Gallatin was warned by Captain Owens, who said:

"I've had experience, mate! I know what I'm talking about. The fact that you have not seen a black is no evidence that he is not here."

"That is true," agreed Frank. "When you see no blacks, it is generally agreed in this country that there are plenty of them near, and that they mean mischief."

"I can take care of myself," said the colonel, confidently.

But this proved a vain boast.

The colonel set out alone and early one day for a distant mountain slope, to secure a valuable and rare species of butterfly.

The day passed and evening came. At dinner it was noticed that the captain had not returned.

At once the alarm spread. Everybody felt sure that his fate was sealed.

"I tell you the blacks have got him," declared the captain.

"Let us hope that he is simply belated," said Frank. "Maybe, overtaken by night, he has been obliged to camp."

This was all logical enough, but yet the terrible fear haunted all.

"I tell you the bushmen are a terrible foe," declared the captain;

"they are so cunning and treacherous. A white man is no match at all for them except in the open."

The matter of a search or relief party was discussed.

But as it was intensely dark this seemed a forlorn hope.

However, there was the searchlight, and with its powerful rays it seemed as if the colonel, if alive and on his way home, might be found.

So it was decided to make an ascension and search for the missing man.

They accordingly went aboard the Flight, and she sprang up into the air.

The search-light's rays were thrown down to the earth and sent hither and thither.

Slowly the air-ship sailed toward the mountain.

It was not long before its slope was reached. Up and down the mountain side the search went on.

Meanwhile what of the colonel? Was it true that he had fallen into the clutches of the blacks?

Leaving the air-ship he had set out in a straight line for the distant mountain which had been named the Lion's Head for want of a better name.

The shape of the mountain warranted this appellation well, for it was very much in the shape of a lion's head.

The intervening region was of the wildest description. There were great tracts of bush land and tangled forest resembling a jungle.

The colonel was right in his element. He wielded his butterfly net with rare success.

Specimen after specimen of the rara avis he found and stowed carefully away in his knapsack.

All the while he was getting further and further away from camp.

He reached the slope of the mountain and here encountered a busy tract of desert land.

The sand was loose and shifting and beneath the desert brush there were venomous reptiles.

Poisonous adders and deadly spiders there found haven. But these had no fear for the naturalist.

He even went so far as to secure a number of them for specimens asphyxiating them with a chemical he possessed.

So intent did the colonel become in his favorite vocation that he took no note of time, or heeded where his footsteps were carrying him.

So the sun was well down in the western sky when he came upon a startling discovery.

At the base of a sage bush he came upon an object which caused his heart to give a leap.

It was the imprint of a bare foot. Undoubtedly the owner was a black native.

For a moment the colonel gazed upon that footprint with curious sensations not unmingled with fear.

He knew what it meant.

He was in the region of the bushmen, the most insidious and deadly strategic foe that one could have to deal with.

The mere finding of this footprint was an omen of great danger.

It meant that the cunning foe were near. Undoubtedly they had him under surveillance.

When this thought is coupled with the knowledge that they might at any moment drive one of their poisoned darts into his body from an unseen covert, the uncomfortable sensations may be comprehended.

The colonel, however, was a plucky and shrewd man.

Conscious that possibly the eyes of any number of the foe might be upon him at the moment, he took no cognizance whatever of the footprint.

He kept on as carelessly as ever, pretending to cage a new butterfly, but all the while edging his way down the slope.

The full enormity of his peril was now upon him.

He seemed almost to feel his black foes about him. It was a mighty effort to control his nerves.

Oh, if there was only some way to signal his friends. If the air-ship could only appear upon the scene.

But it was unreasonable to expect this.

He knew that the extreme peril was all the result of his own rashness, nothing else.

He kept on down the slope, carelessly pretending to chase a butterfly. But he suddenly paused.

He was right in the shadow of a big bush.

Just beyond in a little clearing he saw—most uncommon sight—a powerful black.

The fellow was entirely naked save for a breech clout and carried a blow-pipe and a bag of poisonous darts over his shoulder.

He had just killed a small serpent, and the colonel saw that he was preparing to devour it.

For the snake is a choice article of food among the bush natives. It is esteemed above all else.

The native had severed its head, displaced its vitals, and was peeling the skin from its body.

Then holding it up by the tail, the black began to devour the reptile just as an Italian eats macaroni.

Fascinated as well as stricken with a sense of intense loathing, the colonel watched him.

As he watched, the impulse was strong upon him to shoot the wretch.

But second thought taught him the extreme folly of this.

The shot would of course bring others to the spot, and his life would not be worth a reed.

He little realized that at that very moment he was the cynosure of a score of baleful eyes.

He was watched upon all sides. He was completely surrounded. In fact, was hopelessly in the clutches of the most merciless of man-hunters on the face of the earth.

He did not know what was really a fact that this native devouring the snake was really a preconcerted barrier placed in his path.

But this was true.

He could not go ahead without exposing himself to the native. To go around was his only course.

Had he followed the first and natural impulse he would have cleared his path by shooting the fellow.

But it was fortunate that he did not do this.

Indeed it was the saving of his life. Ten seconds after firing he would have been a dead man.

So the colonel drew back and placed a bush between him and the native.

Then he sought to make a detour. But again he was brought to a startled halt.

There, right before him and not twenty yards distant was another native.

His back was turned to the colonel, and he was making an examination of the ground.

The colonel dodged back and went around another bush. Horrors! there was another native doing the very same thing.

"Jericho!" gasped the astounded naturalist, "are they everywhere?"

An expert plainsman would have realized the situation at once, but the colonel yet clung to the infatuation that he was not observed.

But he did realize that he was surrounded.

This decided him upon a sagacious if not altogether successful move. He got down upon his hands and knees, and crept under a sage bush.

In this way he believed that he would be able to avoid being discovered. As soon as the coast was clear, he intended to come out and make tracks out of the unwholesome locality.

But even as he gave himself up to this hope, he was horrified by a new turn in affairs.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH ENDS THE TALE.

THE covert secured by the colonel seemed a secure one. But as he lay there in fancied security he received a shock.

He saw a native suddenly approaching on all fours like an animal. His conduct was very peculiar.

He would bend down and scent the ground like a sleuth-hound. This recalled the fact to the colonel that these fellows always followed a trail in this manner.

Very little trail was ever left in the sand, so shifting was it.

But the scent of these savages was most abnormal.

"Merciful powers!" reflected the colonel, "he is actually trailing me!"

This was no doubt the truth. Straight toward the bush the native came. His eyes were upon the ground.

Gallatin drew a deep breath.

It seemed to him that he must be discovered and the shock must surely come. It was proper to be well prepared.

So he lifted his rifle and took careful aim at the savage; nearer came the latter.

Had he looked up he must surely have seen the white man; but he did not.

Nearer he came.

Then, just as the colonel had half made up his mind to fire the native paused, hovered a moment and then went directly by the bush.

It was to the colonel as if the hangman's rope had been loosed from his neck.

He drew a deep breath.

"He is off on a false scent," he muttered. "Heavens, what a narrow escape!"

He was about to look after the deceived black, when his attention was again claimed in front.

Another native had appeared; he was also following the trail like the first.

But he proceeded more slowly and made little progress; the colonel watched him intently.

"If this fellow discovers me," he muttered, "I am indeed lost; but it is more than likely he will pass me by."

Thus clinging to the hope the colonel watched him.

But as his attention was drawn in this direction, he never dreamed of looking behind him.

Nor had he thought of the clever ruse being played. The first native had not passed the sage bush far when he turned and came back.

In the rear of the crouching white man he was not seen.

He crept nearer and nearer until he was in the bush.

Then he parted the foliage noiselessly. There was a hissing sound, the passage of a swift body through the air; then talon fingers were about the colonel's windpipe.

He was hurled over backwards, and too late, seeing the game played upon him, was unable to resist.

With animal like cries, other natives reached the spot. Thongs bound his wrists, and he lay helpless upon the ground.

A jibbering, chattering crowd of blacks surrounded him. He was their helpless prisoner.

It can be conceived that his position was hardly of the pleasantest. Words cannot describe.

The sense of despair which came over him was powerful. He realized that his case was hopeless.

The bushmen are merciless. Better appeal to the mercy of wild beasts than to them.

The colonel made no effort to compromise with them. He knew the folly of this.

His best move was to remain stoical and inactive. Oh, how he prayed for the coming of the air-ship.

Would his friends suspect the truth and come out to search for him? Might they not arrive in time to save him?

All these thoughts crossed his mind. Hope blended with deadly terror. Despair supervened all.

"God help me!" he thought. "I shall never see home or friends again."

He had something like an instinctive curiosity to know what they would do with him.

He had heard that many of these blacks were man-eaters. Would they practice their cannibalistic appetite upon them?

Darkness was fast settling down. In a few moments it was pitchy black.

The colonel was not a little puzzled to know what the blacks were up to.

They held a long and earnest conference. Then two of them sat down near him.

The others went trooping off through the bush.

The colonel was never able to fathom their purpose in doing this. But it was the very incident which turned the tide in his favor.

For after some hours had passed he was blinded by a sudden flood of light from the sky. So also were the bushmen.

The colonel knew in an instant what it was.

"The search-light," he gasped; "they are looking for me."

The blacks tried to gaze at the light. But it evidently blinded them. Moreover, being unable to understand it they were stricken with fear.

There was a distant report. One of the blacks threw up his arms and fell. The other fled.

Then down settled the air-ship while bullets were sent whistling in every direction.

It was Barney's keen eyes had detected the colonel and his captors far below.

The Celt had fired the opportune shot and saved the life of Colonel Gallatin.

Down settled the air-ship rapidly. The next moment it touched the ground.

Barney sprang down and cut the bonds of the colonel, and cried:

"Shure, sor, it's a blessing that we've found yez!"

"You have saved my life!" cried the colonel, quite overcome. "I shall never forget that!"

A few moments later he was safe aboard the air-ship.

But the episode was not ended by any means.

Loud shrieking cries were heard from all parts of the bush. The voyagers got into the cabin just in time.

For a shower of darts came rattling down upon the decks, and had any been struck, it must have been a fatal thing for them.

"Mercy on us!" cried Frank; "let's get out of this!"

"Would they dare attack us openly?" asked the captain.

"It is hardly likely," replied Gallatin. "We shall be out of their way very quickly!"

Frank pressed the lever.

There was a terrific buzzing sound in the dynamo room, but the air ship did not rise.

He pressed it again.

No use.

A sudden chilling fear seized him. He descended into the engine-room. It was some while before he came back.

When he did, his face had an ashen pallor.

"We are done for!" he said.

"What?" exclaimed all in chorus.

"The air-ship will never fly again!"

For a moment all were speechless; the effect of this declaration can hardly be imagined.

Then Gallatin said:

"We are lost!"

"Well," said Frank, recovering himself. "Not quite so bad as that I hope. But certainly we are in an unpleasant position."

"What shall we do?"

"The first move that I can see is to beat off these savages; once that is done, we can devise some way to reach the coast and trust to luck to get to a settlement."

"A dismal outlook!" said Captain Owens, "but it seems the only and best move."

"If anybody could suggest a better, I should be pleased to hear it," said Frank.

"There is no other move," agreed the colonel, "let it go at that."

So all picked up rifles and went to the loopholes. As they did so, the forms of the bushmen could be seen hovering in the bush.

For a time they seemed disposed to openly attack the air-ship.

But a hot fire drove them back, and then for a time nothing was seen of them.

The search-light swept the vicinity, and at every opportunity one of the foe was picked off.

But suddenly a terrible cry of alarm came from Barney.

"For heaven's sake, Mither Frank!" he cried, "they're goin' to cook us fer sure! Wud yez luk at that!" Frank saw lurid flames against the dark sky.

"Fire!" he gasped.

The game of the bushmen was readily seen. They had started a fire in the bush.

This would sweep down upon the air-ship and destroy it. There was no way to save it.

It was an appalling moment.

What could be done?

"My soul!" exclaimed Gallatin, "must we lose the air-ship?"

"We must save ourselves," said Frank; "the air-ship is beyond all help."

"But how shall we do that?"

"We must leave her and get away from here as quickly as we can."

"But—"

"What?"

"We will be almost certain to run into the bushmen. They would quickly pick us off."

"Don't fear that," cried Frank, "there won't be one of them in the path of the fire. They will be behind it, and come along to pick up our bones."

"Can we outstrip the fire?"

"That remains to be seen."

"God help us!"

"One thing is sure. There is no move for us but to leave the air-ship."

This point settled, there was no time to be lost.

All hurriedly picked up their effects and started for the bush. The fire was rushing down upon the air-ship like a fierce tornado.

One last sad look was given it. Then they turned away. They never saw it again.

On through the bush fled the fugitives. They knew the importance of reaching the coast at once.

They knew that the blacks would be close behind them. To be overtaken meant death.

As luck would have it they came upon a swiftly flowing river. A hasty raft of logs was made.

This destroyed the trail and threw the blacks off the scent completely. Down to the open sea they drifted.

It would require volumes to describe their adventures and sufferings on the way to the nearest settlement.

For weeks they lived on shell fish and such game as they could find.

But eventually they reached a small sea-port.

The rest is easily told.

A small fishing vessel took them to Melbourne. Here a steamer to San Francisco was obtained.

A few months later they were upon their native soil once again. The great quest was ended.

Frank Reade, Jr. lost his fine air-ship, but he bore the calamity philosophically.

"Never mind!" he said, "I'll build another. The next will be a better one."

He with Barney and Pomp returned to Readstown. There they are sojourning at the present day.

The colonel and the captain became life-long friends. The experiences in quest of the electric island will never be forgotten by either.

And this, dear reader, brings us to the end of our story.

[THE END.]

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